

Some Experiences of Lord Syfret.

BY ARABELLA KENEALY.

HONORIA'S HERO.

ILLUSTRATED BY R. SAVAGE.

CHAPTER I.

WHO is that, Sergeant?" To address a policeman as sergeant is the road royal to his heart, but today the password failed. He was gazing stupidly, and with an abashed countenance, after a thin little man who had returned his obsequious salutation with a cold stare. He remained looking after this uncivil person till he had passed from sight. Then he stooped and flicked a speck of dust from the knee of his uniform with an overdone indifference.

"That's McFerret, of Scotland Yard, our boss-detective, your lordship."

"You don't seem to be a favourite of his."

"I forgot my dooty, your lordship, and he's not the one to forget I forgot it. My dooty was not to reco'nise 'im."

"Ah," I said. "He's after somebody, I suppose?"

Policeman R. looked knowing. Then he resumed his depressed air.

"I igspect I sh'll never 'ear the end o' it," he said dejectedly. "I did it once before and it put me back a year."

I slipped five shillings into his ready palm. "Anything up?" I questioned.

"Must be, your lordship, or he wouldn't be here. But, bless you, he don't tell me. He's as deep as a reservoy. Look out, he's coming back."

The thin little man was returning at a great pace. Something had happened it was plain. There was triumphant excitement in every nervous line of him. Policeman R. simulated unacquaintance to such purpose that half a mile away you would have supposed the man approaching to be his principal creditor.

The thin man passed in the road without turning his head. As he passed he threw these words out sideways:

"Notice young woman walking with young man."

Three minutes later a couple sauntered into sight. My eye was on the man, so that I did not recognise his companion till they were abreast of us. He was a well-built, gentleman-like fellow, with a face that would have been handsome had his brow and jaw accorded better. As it was, the disproportion between brain-stuff and brute-stuff jarred me with a sense of insecurity. That jaw of his was capable of taking the brain between its teeth and bolting in a manner that argued ill to such as stood in its way. For the rest he was broad-shouldered, erect, and carried himself well in his tweeds.

Then my eyes went to his companion. I had only time to raise my hat. She did not notice my salute. She did not see me at all. Her pale face was lifted to the well-cut profile of the man beside her. There were tears on her lashes and love in her eyes. There was something more. I am a bachelor, and I trust by the good offices of Fate to die in that state. But I am a man, and I know what that look means in a woman's face. I know it means, God help her if the conventions of the world have not been satisfied.

As they passed he flashed from under his narrow brows one keen, dare-devil glance in our direction. His voice was lowered: he seemed to be re-assuring her. She had no eyes nor ears for anything but him. It seemed to me she did not listen to his words, but only heard his voice. Twice I saw her carry a trembling hand to her lips, and lay it secretly and with a tender fondness on his shoulder.

I had known her from childhood. I put myself between her and the con-

stable's stare. But the more delicate issues of the case had quite escaped him. His face was one broad grin. He chuckled and slapped his thigh.

"Danged if I ain't got back at him," he blustered. "The best joak out. He doan't make mistakes hisself, doan't my fine gentleman?"

I let him talk. I had other things to think of. Presently McFerret reappeared.

"Well?" he questioned.

"Well, sir," the constable returned, with an intonation of civility that the superior criticism of his eye belied.

"Do you know her?"

"Who?"

"Who! Why, the woman with him. The woman who just passed."

The constable looked important.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir," he rejoined, "I ain't seen any woman pass, though I might ha' seen a lady."

"Lady!" the other echoed. "I guess ladies don't go about with Ted Squance."

"Thet Ted Squance?" Constable R. interrogated. "Well, now you come to tell me it. I shouldn't ha' thought it."

The thin man lost his temper.

"Why the deuce don't you answer my question?"

"Beg pardon, sir," the other said. "I was that took aback becos' I knows both the lady and the gent, and I think——"

"Keep your reflections to yourself, and tell me her name."

"Well, her name's Miss 'Onnery Deans, and she's old Squire Deans's granddaughter; and the gent's a gent as stops at the Court a good bit, which ain't surprisin' seein' he's the Squire's grand-nephew," the constable announced, hammering his information into his superior with the indiscreet alacrity of the common fool driving nails into his coffin.

McFerret levelled at him one look which was an epitaph. Then he took a "D" between his teeth and strode off down the road with the air of a man somewhat late for his train.

"What was the object of that lie?" I asked. "You know the squire has no grand-nephew."

The constable slapped his thigh.

"Begging your lordship's pardon," he explained. "I giv' him as good as he's wuth. P'raps he'll be civiller another time."

But the policy of rapping at one's superiors in office does not pay. The following week a new constable stood at the corner, in the old one's shoes. The old constable had passed from the ranks of the intelligent force. To this day he may be hired as a hewer of wood or a hoer of potatoes.

CHAPTER II.

I HAD known Squire Deans, if anybody might be said to know him, all my life. He was, I imagine, somewhere to be found inside the crustacean accretion of lore and learning he had deposited about him like a shell, but I must confess I never came across a man who had succeeded in penetrating his most exterior cuticle. Like a tortoise he would sometimes steal a clumsy head out, or advance an extremity, and, as you would do with a tortoise, so with him, you had to take such evidence as proof that the shell contained an entity with a nervous and circulatory system.

Deans Court was a structure rambling and immense, dating from the Seventeenth Century. The original building had been so greatly and so incongruously extended, that it gave you the impression of a strange amphibious monster with more limbs than it required. Moreover, it was tunnelled with subterranean

passages wherein, at certain seasons, the wind howled like a dog scenting death. There were secret panellings and sliding walls, and every possible device for such games of hide-and-seek as were played when the seeker carried naked, and it might be dripping, sword in hand, and the hider his life. The oaken floors were dyed in parts with the life-stain that is said not to wash out. Footsteps, booted and spurred, rang over them boldly, and in broad daylight. Silken garments rustled shyly, or fled shivering down the passages. And, doubtless, headless persons walked, for no ghost story that ever has been told of haunted house was not accredited to this one.

The squire was the only person who had never seen or heard anything out of the common, but you would not expect that anything out of the common would trouble to knock long enough upon his horny crust to make itself perceived.

Honoria Deans had never been to boarding-school, for which, from one standpoint, she had something to be thankful. Boarding-schools are human mills whence girls are turned out commonplace and "by the gross"—as toys are "made in Germany."

Her grandfather did not approve of education for girls. He regarded it as waste of good material. He did not, as a matter of fact, approve of girls at all;



indeed, his mind was ever in a twilight of astonishment as to why woman had been created. With means so multiple, resources so fertile at her command, it appeared to him quite simple for Nature to have devised some other expedient whereby a race, masculine and competent, should be perpetuated. "Honoria has the library," he would say with regard to his granddaughter's education, "so long as she does not meddle with my theological section. What more can she want?"

Whatsoever she wanted it was not in the theological section. So Honoria had the library, and she had the garden. The one served her for school-house, the other for play-ground. She had absolutely no companions, young or old.

"Honoria has me," the crustacean had always said, "it is not as if she were alone in the house."

But I do not think Honoria made great demands upon the crustacean for his society. She had other resources. She peopled the garden with persons she met in the library; not the monkish fellows of the theological section, but persons in armour and helmet, in doublet and hose, heroes, and knights and ladies, saints and chivalrous sinners. These she released from the barred imprisonment of printed pages and led them gentle-handed into the sunlight and breeze of the old, wild garden. I have seen her walk and talk there with them; her face aglow, her footstep light and buoyant keeping pace with their fantastic gait, her eyes drinking glimpses, her ears whisperings, of their phantasmal company.

Her grandfather was in some ways right. She was more in her element with these persons of print than she would have been in the society of schoolmisses infected with

a scarlet fever of fine clothes, a measles of self-consciousness, shooting languishing affected glances after the chemist's assistant or music-master—who happened at the moment to be the vulgar idol of the school. If any of Honoria's knights or heroes kissed her on her flushing cheek, or brushed her fingers with aerial hands, what harm was in it? He was a man who had been dead some hundred years, or a man sprung from the finer elements of a romancist's brain, or a man she had fashioned out of the

innocent materials of her own heart. In fine, he was a man for the anatomist to scoff at: a man without any of the dross that serves to keep a head out of the skies, and concerns itself with street-paving, and the disposal of the civic mud; a man with bone and muscle only for the loftiest deeds; a man who would be always running against the telegraph wires seeking unchivalrous giants whom he might devour, a man of such unequal parts that were you to stand him up against a wall he would assuredly pitch over lop-sided, ill-balanced, top-heavy with super-excellence and virtue. Yet, not a man too great to see how fair a girl may look when the winds of a wayward morning or the dreams of a winter night have kindled her eyes and flushed her cheeks. O! I pray you not too great a man for that! Nor one too bent on knightly deeds to miss perceiving how her last new frock became her. A man to go to the lions for his God, a man to war with dragons for his love, a man to lead a conquering army, a man to be Prime Minister or Czar, a man to pen great books, a man altogether too square for this round world of ours, but not a man to harm a girl though she admitted him to her most intimate society, and in her tenderest moods. Honoria's lovers, doubtless, rang the changes, down the ages from King Arthur to Carlyle. They were altogether a gay chameleon, changing their colour according to the page on which they happened to be found. So I had learned from sundry little talks and walks I shared with her when she had grown too old to be ridden on a knee, and later, too young to be kissed.

But now it appeared Honoria had got a lover in the flesh, and—if that face of hers told truth—had, Heaven help her, thought him good enough and top-heavy like that man of her imagining to be admitted to her loneliest moods.

I jumped the fence one noon and met her as she turned the path. Heaven help her, indeed, poor child! There was more now than her face to betray her. She walked slowly and with lids drooped low on a pale cheek. Her cloak had blown aside, and her simplicity took no heed to fold it to its place again. It was December, and the snow lay crisp. She did not hear me come. Till, suddenly, she raised her eyes. Now, thanks be to innocence, the man had failed to harm her! However much a ruffian

he might be, he had not harmed her. Between him and his kisses there had ever come the knight who had been dead some hundred years, the hero who had braved the lions, the warrior, the poet, the Prime Minister, the top-heavy, lop-sided, impracticable creature of her innocent imaginings. The man had brought shame on her in the world's sight. In her own there was none—only wonder and a girl's awe of a tender human mystery—a mystery that had been told with all the baseness blotted out by that shadowy hero of hers.

I noticed that she wore a wedding-ring. Of course! Honoria's sensitive pride would not have satisfied itself with anything less. I pictured such a marriage ceremony as might have taken place in the ruined chapel of the court, the wind moaning, as it had a way of doing, melancholy dirges through the broken organ tubes, the dim light lying on the faded banners, marble persons folding marble hands in everlasting prayer, saints and martyrs richly appalled crowding the windows and emblazoning the light, an owl or two blinking wide-lidded in the dusty chancel, the mice lying close in their holes, while Honoria stood rapt and reverent looking with blind and tender eyes into a low-browed, strong-jawed face, and seeing in it only the familiar trusted features of her hero.

Doubtless the man had been priest as well as bridegroom. Possibly he had read the commination or baptismal service. I was sure it had been all the same to Honoria, whose rapt ears heard but the celestial music of a heaven-made union. Before I had time to speak to her, Honoria broke suddenly into tears.

"Why, Honoria!" I said.

She stopped in her walk and faced me. She put her two hands on my shoulders. I could see how thin her face was, how drawn about the mouth. But there was light in her eyes.

"Uncle Syfret," she said, tremulously (I was no uncle of hers, but it pleased her so to style me), "there are things wonderful, terrible things going to happen. O, if I might only tell you."

"Are you going to have a new frock, Ria, or a season in town?" I asked.

She shook her head.

"O, I am a child no longer," she said. "You forget I was seventeen last month."

"And when may these wonders be expected to take place?" I questioned. "And why terrible? Is anybody to be hurt?"

Her mouth quivered at the corners.

"You see it cannot be helped," she said, "some must be killed—not more than are absolutely necessary. Because, in the end, it is to be so much better for the others."

"I suppose you are talking of the rooks? Has the Squire consented, at last, to have them thinned?"

"The rooks?" she echoed. She turned astonished eyes to me. "Have you not heard? Has the secret been so well kept?"

"So well kept that I had not a notion it existed. Yet I was with your grandfather yesterday."

"O, he knows nothing," she answered, with an undutiful scorn. "He does not even know the Queen is a usurper."

"Well, as you put it like that, Honoria, I confess I was suffering under the same delusion. Into what revolutionary treatise have you been dipping?"

She suddenly wrung her hands.

"O, what a work it will be," she cried, distressed. "When even you, who know so much, believe her a lawful queen."

Seeing her take it so to heart, I expressed myself open to conviction. I had always been led to regard the succession as indisputable, but I was not a man of stubborn prejudices.

She shook her head.

"No, I have said enough," she insisted. Nevertheless, she held a finger up and whispered oracularly, "Wait until Christmas eve, uncle."

"I suppose I have no alternative," I answered. "But, tell me, Ria, are these wonderful and terrible things of such a nature that one should insure his life?"

"O, why will you laugh?" she cried, distressed, "when it is all so real."

I remembered a number of former distresses that had been so real, starting from the time when, at eight years old, I found her without shoes or stockings, and wearing little but a ragged petticoat, leaving home with her grandfather's walking-stick in hand, and a burden on her shivering shoulders, to find the Slough of Despond, Great-Heart, and the Little Wicket-Gate.

"I am not laughing, dear," I said. "You know I would serve you in any way. But, tell me, have you no trouble outside this which concerns itself with usurping queens?"

In a moment her attitude changed. She lifted a shining face; her eyes were lambent.

"No," she said, "beyond that there is nothing but a great joy."

She laid a hand wistfully on mine.

"Uncle Syfret," she said, shyly, "do you know I am ever so sorry for any man I like because God did not will that he should be a woman."

Poor Honoria! She was but seventeen.

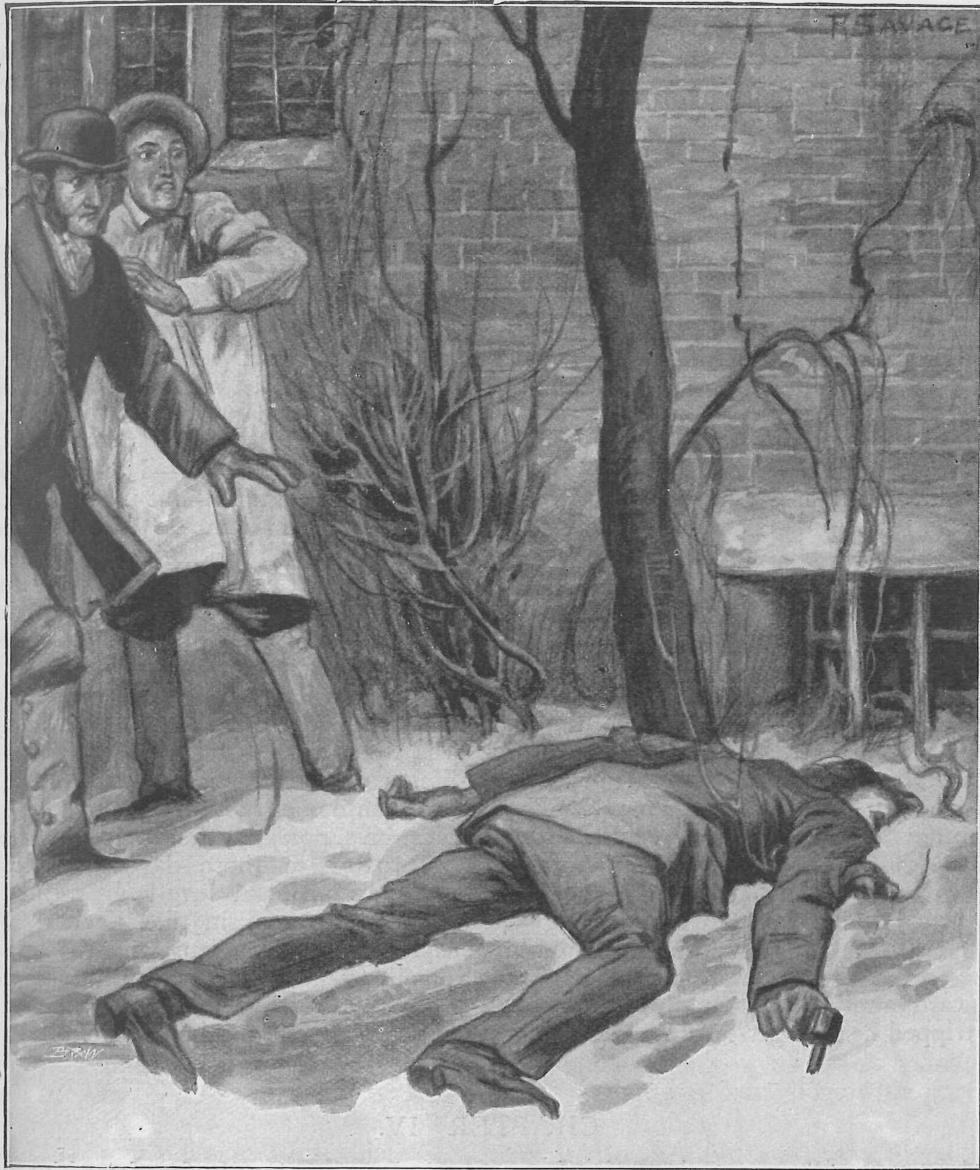
CHAPTER III.

FOR some months the ghosts at the Court had been lively. It would appear they were holding high revel. Quite late into the morning lights were seen burning in the windows; indeed, on more than one occasion they had been overtaken by the milkman, therein registering a sad anachronism. Footsteps were not only heard in the garden, but were traced there next morning, and apparitions which had not been known to put their heads outside the door for years were observed one midnight filing mysteriously out of the shrubbery. A gardener's boy had even overheard remarks let fall by an armoured gentleman he afterwards identified in the picture-gallery—a gentleman in breast-plate, full-bottomed wig, and lace cravat—remarks which were somewhat more

fin-de-siècle than befitted his period and dignity.

"Burn yer blooming soul," he was reported to have blustered, with a distinctness beyond dispute, "d'yer think I'd stir my bloomin' boots ef it wasn't for the tin?"

The sentiment I could not deny as one common to all ages, but the language wherein it was stated did not appeal to me as characteristic of a Seventeenth Century magnate. I dismissed the gardener's hopeful, therefore, as a person on whose word it would be insecure to build history, though there were some who staked their reputations on it. Servants began to leave, and that at a moment's notice. One young woman left in sore dudgeon, declaring that she kept company with a respectable grocer,



"AS ONLY A DEAD MAN LIES"

and she wasn't going to be kissed round corners—gentlemen or no gentlemen, ghosts or no ghosts—by wicked fellows, who ought to be laying like other decent corpses in their coffins." Everybody predicted that "something was about to happen," else why all this post-mortem activity. In former times the manifestations had been rare, and more or less retiring, now they showed a lively disposition to turn the living out of house and home.

I strolled out late one evening. If there were truly things to be seen—The snow made a sort of drab twilight of a moonless night. The Court, with its broad low façade and spread wings, lay like an eyeless creature, crouching in

the shelter of tall trees. Not a light was to be seen. Even the west wing, which stretched out from the main building and climbed a slope—the wing reputed to be the head-quarters of the trouble—was as dark and silent as the rest. I went in at the main gateway, and strolled in the direction of that western wing. As I went round its outer curve, I discovered that my first impression of desertion had been wrong. There was certainly a light burning; a curtain caught up at one corner of a window disclosed a triangular glare. I threw my cigar away. I took my shoes off—the thing had grown interesting. I stole in my stocking feet towards the window.

Having looked in, it is possible I rubbed my eyes ; one does in such cases. Certainly there was cause enough for rubbing eyes, for nobody would have expected to come upon a scene out of Madame Tussaud's, or a charade, at that hour of night in the house of a crustacean neighbour. Side by side on a raised dais sat two crowned figures, one male the other female, round them a group of courtiers, dressed in shining armour and rich stuffs. The crowned woman was of girlish figure, and her robe of ermine-bordered velvet fell over her young shoulders as though she shrank inside its pretentious dignity. Her face was turned away, but the light made a slender shadow of a girlish cheek. The man beside her was of heavy build. His crown, and a mass of curls falling just short of his shoulders, hid his features. All I could distinguish was the bend of an iron jaw. He held a staff in one hand, and from time to time pointed his remarks with it. The crowned woman kept her face turned toward him, the anxious outline of her cheek lifting itself to him in a wistful curve out of a veil of silver tissue. The courtiers stood in a circle on the lower plane of the floor, their profiles to me. The room was brilliantly lighted. The crowned man seemed to be speaking at length. Some uneasy impulse stirred in me to see the woman's face. I moved towards another window; my foot caught, I tripped headlong. As I fell, I thought

I heard the distant ripple of a bell. When I stood up again the scene had vanished. On the other side of the window was abysmal blackness. King, queen, and courtiers had passed like a flash of lightning ; where there had been a brilliant illumination now there was no glimmer of light.

I waited for an hour with my eyes against the window-pane. I might have spared myself the trouble, not a sound nor sight was vouchsafed me. Then I put on my shoes and went home. Had I seen ghosts? Who were the crowned personages? who the courtiers?

A memory came back—I had scarcely noticed it at the time—but it came back with farcical insistence. One of the courtiers during the king's address had bent his head towards a neighbour, and jerked over his shoulder a thumb of derision in the direction of the velvet-robed girl. At the same time a plume of his jewelled cap had caught in a brooch on his fellow's shoulder. Immediately his curls were twisted awry ; a momentary glimpse of a close-cropped crown put a new complexion on his features. In those days, possibly, there were cockney cut-throats ; in those days, doubtless, men wore artificial love-locks. But it was a bit of realism that excited my suspicion. Who, then, was the girl? Something in the lifted outline of the cheek perturbed me. I determined to put the matter into other hands.

CHAPTER IV.

" IF you please your lordship, I am sorry to disturb your lordship's breakfast, but the gentleman who dined with you last night has been found murdered at the Court."

I did not finish my second cutlet. In less time than that would have taken I had joined a knot of men who stood grouped about something lying in the snow before the western wing. The news was more true than most news. McEwan—a smart young fellow I had set upon the enigma of the Court—lay huddled in an area of trampled snow as only a dead man lies. It was a ghastly spectacle : he had been literally kicked to death. In one hand was the revolver I had given him the previous evening. Two of its charges had been fired, apparently to some pur-

pose, for some twenty feet from him the snow was disturbed again, and showed a patch and trail of blood. Somebody reported having heard shots fired during the night.

The squire was dragged from his study, whence he came sidling and reluctant. He could not see, he said, what use his presence served. The man was obviously dead ; it was a case for the police. Meanwhile proofs of *Pantheistic Man* lay uncorrected in his study. He gave up the keys of the house with peevish eagerness. We might search the west wing certainly, and the east wing, and the main building. The whole place was free to us to come and go so long as we did not invade the library or meddle with his theological section.

The west wing showed suspicious signs of occupation. For years the door between it and the rest of the house had been locked and bolted, neither servants nor members of the family being known to enter it ; yet the dust of the floors showed prints of heavy boots, such boots as those that had done poor McEwan to death ; and the furniture was brushed bright in parts from recent use. The key of the door, but only I knew this, was in Honoria's possession. To all my questions she turned only a white, horror-stricken silence. "It had to be," she said, and "Wait until Christmas eve."

After much fruitless investigation, the crime was laid to the already heavy account of a local gang of poachers, and the police directed their energies accordingly. For a while the west wing lost its evil name, the lights and sounds had vanished.

One evening I received a note from Honoria. It was written in an agitated hand, and preferred a request. I should have regarded it as singular from any other than this girl. But anything in Honoria that was not singular, would have been singular in Honoria. She sent me a case of rings and her little pearl-set watch, and begged that I would lend her a few thousand pounds. Knowing Honoria, the request surprised me. The rings and watch at the most were not worth two hundred. I was acquainted with Honoria's jewel-case. It had been well if somewhat venerably stocked ; and the fact that Honoria, poor child, had sent me so little security for my money was evidence enough that these slender possessions were all that remained to her. During this time I had done my utmost to obtain her confidence; but she kept her secret with all the fond tenacity of woman shielding man.

I answered her note in person. The facts looked serious. She was sitting in the little morning-room, her face buried in her hands. I was shocked indeed to see her, she was so white and wan. Poor Honoria ! I wondered if she still wasted sympathy on men because they were not women.

"It is so kind of you," she said, starting up. "I knew you would not say no."

"Business with men is a serious matter," I answered, taking her hands ; "and one needs some security for thousands of pounds, my dear."

She looked up helplessly into my face. "The watch and rings are not enough?" "Well, you avaricious young person, you have plenty more. I will take, for example, your emerald necklace."

She turned her face away. Her hand trembled in mine.

"No," she faltered.

"No?" I repeated. "Your set of rubies and your amethyst and silver belt, then?"

She shook her averted head.

"And what do you mean by a few thousand pounds, Ria. It is vague for a business transaction ?"

"You could not spare more than four?" she questioned, searching my face.

"Four thousand pounds is a good deal of money. I must certainly have the emerald necklace and the diamond crescent."

"The one you gave me, godfather ?"

"The same, godchild."

Her face lighted up.

"I have that," she cried ; "I would not part with that." She hurried from the room. After some minutes she returned, with a bewildered look.

"I cannot find it anywhere," she said ; "yet I know I must have it somewhere. I wore it last night."

"Why, where were you last night, Miss Cinderella ?"

She hung her head.

"That is one of the things I may not tell you."

"Honoria," I insisted, "you must. I must know what you want this money for, and what you have done with your jewels."

She lifted her face ; it was beautiful with light.

"Godfather," she said, "it is such a noble cause."

"It appears to be an expensive one, at any rate. You must tell me about it. Who is the man ?"

The blood mounted to her eyes.

"Who told you ?" she faltered.

Who told me ! Did any person out of a nursery need telling.

"You wear a wedding-ring, my dear."

"Yes," she said, simply. "It is true, I am married."

I questioned her about him. She scarcely heard me : her mind was away.

"Godfather," she said, when I had done, "have you ever known a man who was as handsome as—as no other man ever was before, and as brave and as

true"—her voice broke—"and as tender as a woman, and full of noble aims, and generous and reverent, and yet could be gallant, and clever, and gay——"

Description failed her, she broke off suddenly, and stretched two wistful palms to something invisible to me.

"No, my dear," I answered, when her eyes came questioning to my face, "I have never known such a man."

"O, but there is one," she cried, "there is one."

"What," I queried, "the man who has your jewels?"

She looked at me, then cried out in laughter, that was more than one part tears:

"Why, godfather, did you think he took them for himself?"

"I thought so, Ria."

There were laughter and tenderness together in her eyes.

"O!" she whispered, "you do not know the man I mean."

I thought I should like to. I am not normally violent, but neither am I unintermittently normal.

"Ria," I insisted, "you must tell me what has been done with your jewels, and for what you want this money; if not, I must go to your grandfather."

"Not to-night?" she said, catching her breath.

"Not to-night, of course," I rejoined. "It is too late to-night."

She breathed more freely.

"You shall know before long," she said.

I could learn nothing more, and left her. It is needless to say I left her still without those thousands.

CHAPTER V.

HAVING time on my hands and business with him, I drove to my lawyer. After business we got upon a bottle of

port, so that it was nearly midnight when I drove home by Dean's Court. As we turned the corner there was a crevice of light showing in a window of the western wing.

I pulled the check rein.

"I shall walk the rest of the way," I told the men. "By the bye, if I do not



"THEIR FACES LOOKED GREEN"

turn up in a couple of hours, come up, half-a-dozen of you, to the west wing of the Court."

In the moonlight their faces looked green. I believe for a moment it occurred to them to restrain me forcibly; but I plunged through the hedge and into the darkness.

It appeared that my curiosity was to be unrewarded, for the streak of light

admitted nothing more to my view than a portion of brilliantly illuminated ceiling.

I went cautiously—my mind on McEwan—the round of the windows. In the last a top pane was broken. I could hear though I could not see. At first there was merely a confused murmur to be made out, but by and bye it resolved itself into connected speech.

"If it please your Royal Highness," an obsequious voice said, "the latest despatches from France inform us of delay. Nothing can be done until her Royal Highness has handed over the money promised. In the event of her Royal Highness being unable to procure the sum stated in coin, it is known that there are valuable services of gold and silver plate, and various works of art in the strong-room of the Court, which would do equally well. Her Majesty has but to hand the keys to me, and all will be arranged."

There was dead silence, you might have heard a pin drop. Then a woman's voice broke out, distressed :

"Charles, dear, O ! I can't do that. You know I can't do that."

There was a longer silence. Then a man said, gruffly, "It's our last chance. We can't do anything without the money, Ria."

Another pause, then a sobbing whisper:

"Charles, dear, you know I cannot do that. They are not mine."

"You hear what she says," the man pronounced sullenly.

A horrible, hoarse murmuring uprose. At the same time half-a-dozen fellows sprang heavily to their feet.

"Force her," was shouted. "Tommy rot." "How'd she like her throat cut, or be kicked?" "D' she think we're going to be done out of it?" "Curse'er for a fool."

The strong voice rolled out :

"Silence there ! Silence, or I swear I'll put a dozen bullets among you."

There was a terrified girlish cry.

"Silence you fools," the voice insisted, in a lower key.

At that moment I thanked Providence for the brute force of the jaws it issued from. "We'll pull round yet. The coin will pass in America." The tones rose again, and took on an unreal bombast : "The cause gains daily. We have but to strike one blow, and victory is ours."

He was greeted with hoarse laughter.

"O ! blow the cause. This ain't any time for play-acting."

"Cussed if it is," another said ; "there's been a dashed deal too much time wasted on it a'ready."

The protest was taken up. There was a sudden trampling of feet as of an uprising of violent men. In my eagerness to see I had nearly broken a window-pane. I thought timely of McEwan. Above the trampling and roar I heard the click of a revolver. There was silence again. Then the same voice said, in tones of suppressed rage :

"I swear before God I'll put a bullet through the next man who speaks."

The silence broke once more into murmuring, this time the murmur of subjection.

"Our further councils," the strong voice said, "will be best conducted without the presence of the queen."

The cry of a half-caught sob swept like the wailing of a harp across the murmuring.

The man's voice lowered : "Yes, you must go, Ria, I can manage them better by myself."

"Charles, Charles !" she pleaded.

"Room there for the queen," he shouted. "The queen leaves the council-chamber."

"O , no she don't !" a fellow said. I heard him take two steps across the floor ; but he stopped short. I imagine he thought better of it. Again I thanked Providence for the iron in that jaw.

"Blest if she ain't agoin' to kiss 'im in front of us all," one chuckled brutally close up against the window.

"She's ony a puttin' 'er 'and on 'is arm to see he ain't made out o' air or sky, or a bit o' blooming 'eaven," another said, sardonically.

There was a rustle of garments, then a girl cried, falteringly :

"Friends! you would never harm your king ?"

The obsequious voice that had first spoken replied, ironically :

"Madame, our king is as the apple of our eye."

A door closed—there was a moment's silence. Then the obsequious voice changed to an extremely bullying one.

"Now, then, Squance, chuck the Adelphi, and don't waste any more time. Perhaps you'll give us your kingly plans ?"

"I will," the other answered, coolly. "It's every man for himself, and the

devil take the fool who's fool enough to be taken."

There was a rush of feet.

"Keep off," he cried. "If I fire it will bring the police. The place is thick with them—McFerret brought a trainful down to-night. As it is, you'll find it precious hard to get away."

"We've got that bit o' bizness to do first," was shouted, brutally. "Keys or no keys, we ain't agoin' before we've lifted every brass farthin's worth in the house."

"No, that I swear you shan't," Squance said; "I'll set the cops on you myself first."

There was a hoarse roar. Then he shouted, violently:

"Sykes, I'll shoot you like a dog if you lay hands on that door."

Immediately the place was pandemonium. There were scuffling and trampling of brutal feet. There was the dull sound of blow meeting blow. The air was thick with horrible cries, and more horrible curses. A sudden blackness where the triangular glare between the window-frame and curtain had been showed that the lights had gone out. Inside there was to be heard the hoarse muttering and gasping breath as of men tearing one another limb from limb. Then a blinding flash, and two pairs of hands grappled down upon my shoulders. Before I had time to turn I found myself in handcuffs.

"We're thirty strong, and you'd best come quiet, mate," a rough voice blurted in my ear.

CHAPTER VI.

I STOOD in the snow for an hour, my hands linked together, a man with a bludgeon standing over me.

"You may be Lord Syfit, for all I cares," he said, uncivilly; "but you're along o' Gentleman Squance's gang o' coiners, and I guess you're in for fourteen year."

I was glad when my numbed limbs were presently trotted into the interior of the western wing. At a table, showing an exultant, if an unpleasant face, McFerret sat. Round him were officers and prisoners in various stages of dilapidation. On the floor great clots of blood and dust, overturned furniture and torn upholstery showed how violent a struggle there had been. In one corner a man lay dead.

As I entered by one door Honoria entered by another. Honoria in a trailing dressing-gown that showed her pitiful condition, her long hair falling disordered about her. Her face wore a curious stricken look—its blanched whiteness throwing up her terror-darkened eyes. A police-sergeant had her by the arm.

"Is this the woman?" asked McFerret. A mean-faced ruffian started forward. "Thet's 'er, yer worship," he whined. "'Twas 'er gave us the key."

The officer in whose custody he was dragged at him savagely. Behind McFerret's back I was pleased to see him grip and shake the wretch. I marked his number—I mentally devoted half a sovereign to his service.

"Mr. McFerret," I began. My constable took me straightway by the collar, while McFerret shouted "Silence!" A second time he shouted it, and the second time he did so I was shaken by the stalwart fool in whose care I was, as though I had been a rat.

"Sir, is he hurt?" Honoria entreated of the detective.

"I am bound to inform you," the latter rasped, "that anything you say will be used in evidence against you."

"Only tell me if he is hurt?" she repeated. Her eyes swept the room; they dilated for a moment on the body lying in the corner.

One of the prisoners mumbled, good-naturedly, and as articulately as a man with a broken jaw may mumble:

"He's got off, ma'am—clean safe."

Her face became illumined.

"Is the battle won?" she faltered.

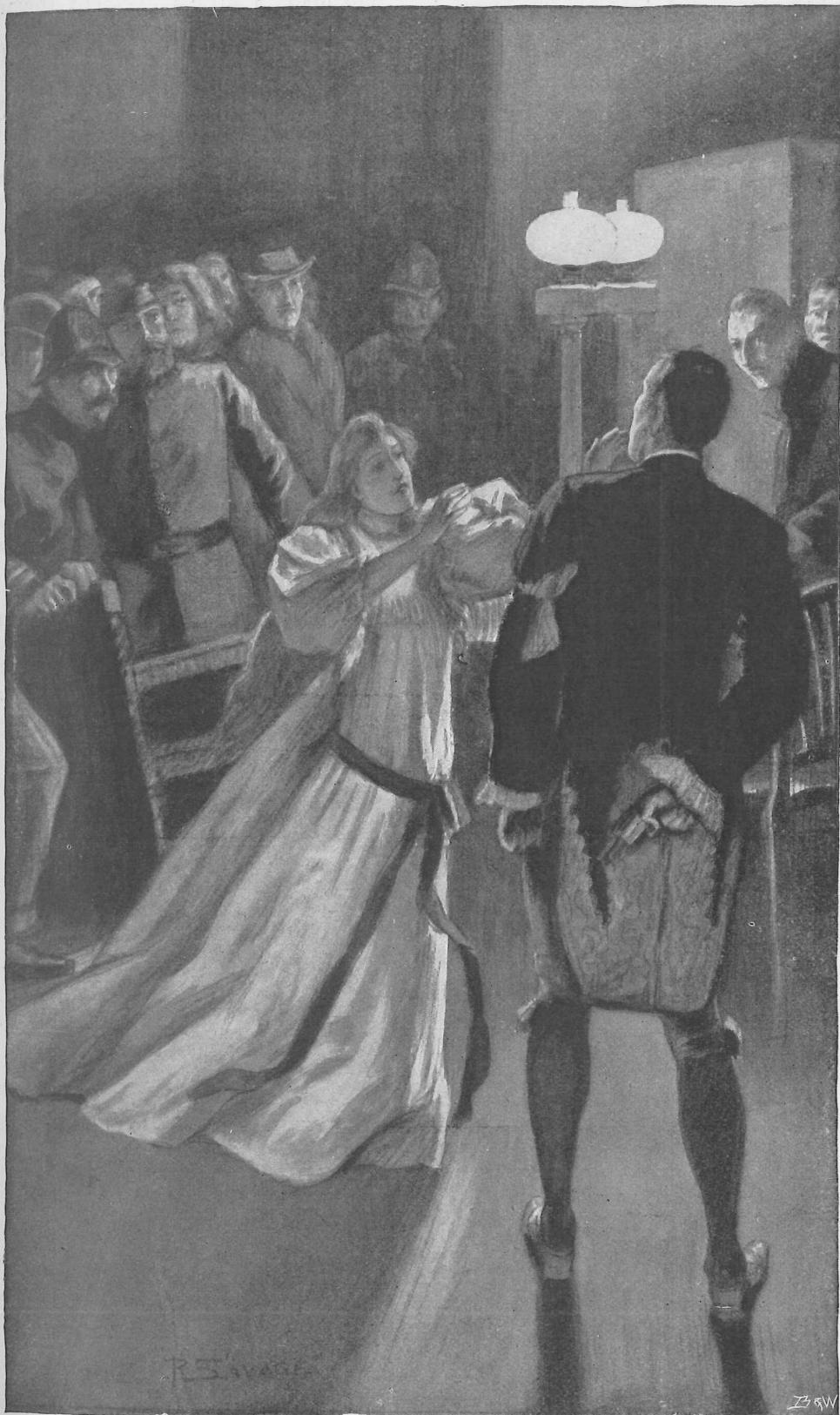
"We've dropped that king business," the other said, shortly.

Suddenly she bent her ear. She ran towards the door. A constable took her gently by the shoulder.

"Charles," she cried, in a low, piercing voice, "don't come, dear, don't come, there is danger."

Not a sound had been audible to anyone. An officer darted outside; after a minute he came back, "No one there," he said.

A minute later a man walked into the room; he was ghastly pale, and walked with difficulty. His right arm hung



"I SWEAR TO YOU THAT I AM KING"

broken at his side. Across one cheek a great gash went, and blood had dripped from it on to his collar and shirt. I knew him in a moment for the man with whom I had seen Honoria. It was a strong, bad face, despite its handsomeness. He walked in with a brazen coolness.

Half-a-dozen officers, McFerret among them, started towards him ; but Honoria was first, she had her arms about him, her cheek lay pressed against his cut one, where the blood was drying. She was sobbing her heart out in kisses.

"Dearest," she cried, as a soul might cry out for salvation, "tell me that what they say about you is not true. Tell me you are really a king."

With one clenched fist he parried the officers above her prone head, with his wounded arm he pressed her face down on his chest.

"Before God, Honoria," he cried out, passionately, "I swear to you, as I hope for mercy, that I am the lawful king, and you, my wife, are queen."

"O, thank heaven!" she cried ; "my dear, my dear."

He made a little movement towards his breast.

"Good Lord!" I shouted, "stop him."

But I was too late. There was a flash and a loud report, one long sob, and a quiver of her clinging frame. Then her arms fell from about his neck, a red stain spread in the side of her white gown.

In a moment a dozen hands were on him—in a moment she was torn out of his hold.

"Coward!" "Devil!" rose in execration round him. He was buffeted and roughly handled.

He flung the smoking weapon from him. The mortal hunger of the gaze he sent after it told at what price he had spared her his last bullet. He wiped his dry lips. Then his eyes turned towards her body, where they had laid it on a couch. For one moment Honoria's poet-knight, Prime Minister, looked out of his gashed face.

"Fools!" I heard him mutter, as they handcuffed him, "it is the one decent act of my life, and I shall hang for it!"

